



The President's Daily Brief

March 27, 1976

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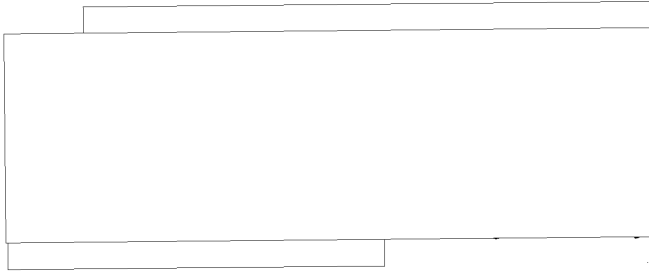
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LEBANON



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The Syrians may attempt to salvage their mediation effort, but much will depend on a meeting tentatively scheduled for today between President Asad and Arafat. Lebanese leftist leader Kamal Jumblatt also plans to go to Damascus today. His attitude--as much as Arafat's--will determine Syria's next step.

The Syrians have been in contact with major Lebanese Christian leaders and, after talking with Arafat and Jumblatt, they may decide whether a renewed attempt at mediation is worth risking another diplomatic failure.

Phalanges leader Pierre Jumayyil and Interior Minister Shamun--who together hold the key to the Christians' next move--apparently are coordinating their tactics, but neither seems sure about what to do next. Jumayyil issued a statement yesterday in which he called partition the "most abhorrent" solution to the crisis. He expressed some hope that Syrian mediation might still succeed, but raised the possibility of putting the Christian case before the UN or the Arab League.

Heavy fighting continued yesterday and early today in Beirut and in the mountainous district east of the city, although neither Muslim nor Christian forces appeared to be making appreciable gains.

The US defense attaché in Syria reported no unusual military activity along the Damascus-Beirut road as of early yesterday. After conversations with various Syrian army commanders on Thursday, he concluded that the Syrians are now in a

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readiness posture that would enable them to move forces into Lebanon within a few hours, should Asad take the political decision to do so.

The Israelis yesterday flew several reconnaissance missions over Lebanon and the eastern Mediterranean.



USSR-EGYPT

Egyptian President Sadat publicly confirmed yesterday that Cairo has barred the Soviets from using Egyptian port facilities.

Several Soviet naval ships in the eastern Mediterranean are apparently reacting to events in Lebanon.

[redacted] the Soviets have been given until April 15 to evacuate the Al Gabbari shipyard at Alexandria. Three Soviet vessels--two F-class submarines and an ocean-going tug--are still being overhauled in the yard. There are some indications that the Soviet evacuation of Alexandria is under way.

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[redacted]

A Sverdlov-class cruiser and a Kashin-class destroyer have moved from their anchorage in the Gulf of Sollum and are now near Tartus, Syria, and may already have entered port.

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[redacted]

The Soviets may be reacting to the movements of a US naval force in the Mediterranean. Alternatively, in view of their imminent ouster from Alexandria, the Soviets may be using the crisis in Lebanon as a pretext for establishing a greater naval presence in Syria than has previously been permitted. Moscow could also simply be considering the possible need to evacuate Soviet civilians from Beirut.

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USSR-CUBA-ANGOLA

(Following are the key points from an interagency intelligence memorandum on Soviet and Cuban aid to the MPLA in Angola during February 1976.)

The value of support provided the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola by the Soviet Union and Cuba in February 1976 amounted to at least \$125 million, measured in US equivalent costs. This brings total estimated Soviet and Cuban aid to the MPLA for the year beginning March 1, 1975, to over \$400 million.

Although overall tonnage of goods delivered in February rose above the January level, we believe that the amount of military goods shipped declined. Arms deliveries, however, included the first confirmed shipments of MIG-21 aircraft.

A large portion of the February deliveries was foodstuff.

We believe an additional 1,500 Cubans were sent to Angola in February, raising the total number of Cuban military personnel in country to about 13,500. Since late February, the number has probably remained at this level, as further arrivals have been offset by an equal number of troops, including some wounded, returning to Cuba.

The airlift from the Soviet Union during February was limited to one flight, and passenger flights from Cuba were put on a regular every-other-day schedule beginning in mid-month.

Sealift operations between Cuba and Angola were increasingly integrated into the Cuban merchant fleet's worldwide schedules.

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ETHIOPIA

Ethiopia's ruling military council has moved sharply to the left over the past two months.

Leftists on the council--led by First Vice Chairman Mengistu Hailemariam--are emphasizing a radical socialist program in an effort to broaden the council's narrow base of popular support.

Since mid-February the council has reshuffled the cabinet and has arrested thousands of middle-of-the-road and conservative civilians, government officials, and military officers. For several weeks the official media have been campaigning against "bureaucratic capitalists" for holding back Ethiopia's socialist reconstruction.

Mengistu's bid for leftist domestic support has been accompanied by an attempt to draw closer to communist countries, especially the Soviet Union. Praise of the USSR has increased markedly in the Ethiopian media, and visiting Soviet delegations have received fulsome local coverage. Early this month, a high-level mission was dispatched to Peking, and its activities also have been heavily publicized.

The council hopes Moscow will use its close ties to Mogadiscio to restrain Somalia's aggressive designs on the French Territory of the Afars and Issas, through which Ethiopia's principal rail outlet passes.

Media attacks on Western capitalists and "racists" for alleged wrongdoing in Africa have a strong anti-American flavor, although the US is usually not named directly. Despite these attacks, the government still follows its official policy of maintaining good relations with the US.

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Argentina's military government is extending and consolidating its control. Officers now occupy all federal executive posts and top jobs in the 22 provinces and some local jurisdictions.

Apparently encouraged by the lack of resistance thus far, the junta is relaxing some of the more obvious controls. The US embassy reports that roadblocks are now down, airports are operating normally, and censorship of the press has been eased. The greatest potential for opposition lies with the terrorists, who so far have remained relatively inactive. Labor, too, can be expected to protest when, as seems likely, the government announces further economic austerity measures.

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